



**October 2013**

**NEWSLETTER FOR THE PAID & VOLUNTEER STAFF OF RAILTOWN 1897 STATE HISTORIC PARK**

**Upcoming Events**

**October 1**

Ladies Luncheon at the Black Oak Casino  
call Marge at 533-4595

**October 2, 3, 4**

Decorating the trains for our 'Harvest Haunt' trains. Join us and help make our trains festive starting at 9am Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Call Karen Kling if you can help 416-8062

**October 3**

Annual pumpkin gathering expedition to Manteca, (meet at Railtown 8am)

**October 5 & 6, 12 & 13, 19 & 20, 26 & 27**

The 'Skeleton' crew is back on board for our 'Harvest Haunt' trains (some T-shirts are still available)

**October 10**

Planning meeting for the Starlight Express Trains 1 pm in the Carriage Room

**October 12**

Columbia & Railtown Volunteer Mixer & BBQ Starts at 4:30pm at the Burns Cottage Garden in Columbia (call Dave 984-4408)

**October 23**

Railtown Gang potluck brunch at Pine Crest Call Dottie @ 533-8483

**October 27**

Regular excursion train season ends. Next trains are the Starlight Express and Santa trains on November 29, 30, and December 1, 14 and 15

**November 5**

Ladies Luncheon at Applebee's  
Call Marge @ 533-4595

## Weird Railroad News—Truth of Fiction?

### Haunted Railroad Crossing In Visalia

There are stories of a haunted railroad crossing in Tulare County, south of the city of Visalia. The railroad crossing is located where Avenue 271 turns into Santa Fe Avenue via two 90 degree turns. The tracks here don't receive much traffic anymore as the line seems to be abandoned now. Yet for whatever reason there seems to be several hauntings at this crossing.

It's said if you park your car on the tracks you can hear the sounds of a train passing by as well as the ghostly images of people walking towards your car. And when you try to start your car back up it seems to take longer for the engine to turn over, almost as if the battery is being drained by something else.. Also, on some nights around 3 am a phantom train can be seen. The origin of this haunt is unclear but one can imagine that given the time of the sighting, a train may have derailed sometime early in the morning.. It's also said a white figure can be seen walking along the road next to the crossing late at night. Whether this figure is related to the ghost train is unclear.

### Man Selling His Own Thumb to Save Haunted Train Museum

Since 1976, John Baker has run the Bakers Junction Railroad Museum in Smithville, Indiana. The museum — which operates a haunted house in old railcars — has fallen on tough financial times, so Baker's turned to an unusual source of fundraising capital. That is, his own severed thumb. John's story: I was using a saw over my head but I only have one good leg & it has a bad knee & it gave out & I fell down & the saw jumped out & cut my finger off. I dumped out a coke & put my finger in the glass of ice & my friend James drove me to the VA hospital 60 miles [away] but the saw mangled my finger up [too] bad to be put back on so I put it back into [my] pocket & brought it home. I had my finger mummified & made [into] a key chain on a stainless [steel] chain set in clear plastic. I am selling it to pay for a new metal roof for the two train stations at Bakers Junction Railroad Museum at Smithville Indiana & they need a new roof badly. According to John, his money troubles stem from a conflict with the "Commie zoning board" of Bloomington, Indiana. If you enjoy dismembered appendages and haunted railcars, this is a stop for your next vacation.

### The Ashtabula Train Disaster

This tragic event is the origin of the nearby Haunted Chesnut Grove Cemetery, where many of the train victims are buried. The accident was caused largely by the collapse of the railroad bridge. Legend states that the ghosts of the victims return to the bottom of the bridge on the anniversary of the disaster. The bridge was owned by the Lake Shore  
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The Chesnut Grove Cemetery

## Pioneering Railroad Women of the 1800s

Part 2, continued from the last issue)

submitted by Karen Kling/ Interpretive Specialist

### Telegraph Workers – Women in Positions of Responsibility

Telegraph work was an important breakthrough for women in railroading. For the first time, women were put in positions of responsibility by taking orders, keeping trains on schedule, and warning about dangers on the tracks. Telegraphy provided employment for a significant number of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Miss E.F. Sawyer was reportedly the first American female telegraph operator and worked for the Burlington Railroad in Montgomery, Illinois.



### Inventors – Improving the Safety and Comfort of Rail Travel

#### Eliza Murfey – Preventing Derailments

History does not record much about Eliza Murfey's life, but we do know that in the 1870s she obtained patents for sixteen devices that improved the packing of bearings and lubrication of railroad car axles thereby reducing derailments caused by seized bearings and axles.

#### Mary Walton – Reducing Air and Noise Pollution

As cities began to grow, noise and air pollution became serious concerns. In 1879, Mary Walton applied for and received a patent for a technology she invented that reduced factory smokestack emissions by diverting the smoke through water tanks to capture pollutants. She later adapted this system for use on locomotive stacks.

Another huge problem for cities was the noise created by mass transit system elevated rails. The noise was overwhelming and psychologists treated hundreds of people for stress conditions brought on by the thundering trains. Mary set up a model railroad in her basement and used it to develop a sound dampening system. The elevated track was set within a wooden box that was lined with cotton and filled with sand. In 1891, she received a patent for her sound dampening system and eventually sold the patent to the Metropolitan Railway of New York City.



#### Mary I. Riggins – Saving Lives at Railroad Crossings

Railroad crossings were dangerous places in the early days of railroading. While flagmen were stationed at busy crossings, waving a large red flag or a lantern to warn people of oncoming trains, many crossings were unmanned or had primitive gates that were neither reliable nor safe. These gates gave no warning and often came down too quickly, injuring animals or people. Riggins invented pulley controlled gates, the first of which was installed near Baltimore in 1889. She later modified the design using electricity to work the gate and to provide a warning before the arm lowered. Her designs are still used in today's crossing gates and parking lots.

#### Catherine L. Gibbon – Simplifying and Improving City Rail Lines

Catherine Gibbons is another woman we know very little about. We do know that she was married and had three daughters and that she and her husband owned a business that sold railroad parts and equipment. Catherine received two mechanical patents in 1890 for inventions that improved and simplified the joining of adjacent track rails and provided a smoother riding rail car. Catherine Gibbons was awarded the John Scott Legacy Medal in 1892 for "Improvements in Street Railroad Track Construction."



(continued from page 1) and Michigan railroad, and was the joint creation of Charles Collins, Engineer, and Amasa Stone, Chief Architect and Designer. Collins did not approve of Stone's bridge design, calling "too experimental." However, he reluctantly approved its construction due to pressure from the company and outside sources. On the evening of December 29, 1876, the Pacific Express was traveling over the fated bridge, carrying approximately 159 passengers and crew. Only the first engine made it to the other side, just as the bridge started to collapse. The rest of the train broke away and plummeted to the bottom of the ravine below. Approximately 92 men, women and children were killed. Most did not die from the fall itself, but were literally burned alive while trapped inside the crushed cars. This was the result of oil lamps and stoves which ignited the fire. The mass grave of the unidentified victims and Charles Collins' crypt lie within a few feet of each other. The towering marker stands over the mass grave of the unknown dead. Many believe this site is haunted by the spirits of the unknown dead, as well as that of Charles Collins. Amasa Stone committed suicide approximately 2 years later. Stone was held partly responsible for the disaster by the same investigative jury before which Collins had testified, and was publicly scorned for many years (Stephen D. Peet, *The Ashtabula Disaster*, Chicago: J. S. Goodman-Louis Lloyd & Co., 1877).

## Railtown News

### Can You Help With Halloween Decorations?

It's time again to pull out our spooky decorations and adorn our rail cars in advance of our month long Harvest Haunt trains. Karen Kling will coordinate the activity which will take place starting at 9 am on Wednesday, October 2nd, Thursday, October 3rd and Friday, October 4th. Please call in if you can help, 209-416-8062

### Volunteer Mixer Planned

Normally the Railtown gang goes to Perko's or other local restaurants after a long day of excursion trains. Instead, please join us for a BBQ and get together with our neighbors, the Columbia State Park volunteers. It's planned for Saturday, October 12 at 4:30pm in Columbia at the Burns Cottage Garden. (located on the same block as the St. Charles Saloon). A main dish, soda and water will be provided. Columbia volunteers will bring a side dish and Railtown volunteers are asked to bring a dessert. Entertainment will be provided by the Sierra Mountain Band!

### Santa's Starlight Express Planning Meeting

Join us at 1 pm, Thursday, October 10th for our annual planning meeting in the Carriage Room for the Starlight Express. We'll discuss and plan all related activities for this huge event, including the lighting, decorating and all volunteer related activities.



Railtown at the Admissions Day parade in Columbia    Volunteer Field trip to ride the V & T in Virginia City    Staff Gets New Vision for Railtown

The coming of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw women expanding their experience and value to the railroads. 1901 saw the first female railroad president, and during both world wars, women filled a wide variety of railroading positions while the men were away at war. With even more opportunities available today, women continue to help keep the railroads rolling.



**PO Box 1250**  
**Jamestown, CA 95327**  
**Return Service Requested**

**TO:**



**Depot Store-** (209) 984-3953  
**Volunteer Desk-** (209) 984-4408  
**Volunteer Website-** <http://railtown.team.parks.ca.gov/volunteers>  
**Railtown Blog-** [www.railtown1897.wordpress.com](http://www.railtown1897.wordpress.com)  
**Newsletter Editor—** [Dave.Rainwater@parks.ca.gov](mailto:Dave.Rainwater@parks.ca.gov)  
**Crew Caboose-** (209) 984-0352



### **Railtown Paid and Volunteer Staff Contact Information**

*(all area codes are 209)*

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